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ABSTRACT

A critical reader "does more than simply soak up bits and pieces of information." He applies a personal reserve of knowledge and experience to a text to ascribe possible meanings. In other words, he interprets. In addition, he compares his own values and beliefs with those suggested to him by a text and defends them, if necessary. In other words, he argues. Moreover, he often organizes his personal response by classifying or comparing possible meanings and then generalizes about comprehensive meaning. In other words, he infers. Finally, he analyzes the author's ideas, information, tactics and then predicts the author's semantic direction. In other words, he speculates. These behaviors suggest that interpretation, argumentation, inference, and speculation are a reader's higher-order concerns. Through a literature workshop method, a teacher must help students through these various stages. A student in the motivation stage, for instance, needs sufficient background on a reading topic to begin interpretation. In a workshop, study of a piece of literature can be individualized through certain activities. In a reading log, the student might write about what she already knows about the topic--in the case of "Fahrenheit 451" about censorship, or in the case of "Great Expectations" about nontraditional households. Other reading stages are similarly facilitated. As the critical reading of literature becomes normal practice through both the individualized-study and the core-study activities, thinking becomes habitual for students. (TB)

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Developing Thinking Skills through Literature

by
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In Shakespeare's sonnet, it is said that "a rose by any other name would smell as sweet." In developing a sound method of teaching literature, a teacher is searching for a rose that goes by many other names: "critical thinking," "critical reading," "reasoning," and "problem-solving," to name a few. So, what is growing in the garden of a student's mind when the student is reading literature? What is the teacher trying to cultivate? And what sweet smell will tell the teacher that something desirable, like a rose, is indeed growing?

RELATION BETWEEN THINKING AND READING

However researchers name "thinking," they usually stress one of the high-level thought processes categorized by Benjamin Bloom. In the choice of terms, the researcher merely reveals a partiality for one of the thought processes. One uses the term "critical thinking" for thinking that relates personal knowledge to new information and turns the new information into new personal knowledge (Wilson 6), thereby stressing interpretation. Another uses the term "reasoning" for thinking that demands adequate support for personal values and beliefs (Tama 1), thereby stressing evaluation. Yet another uses the term "problem-solving" for thinking that makes generalizations out of particular bits of information (Beck 676), thereby stressing analysis and synthesis. Whatever term is used and whatever thought process is stressed, *thinking, then, is what one does when one interprets, evaluates, analyzes, synthesizes, and applies , in complementary ways, information and ideas .*

"Critical reading" is a manifestation of thinking. It has been defined variously as "an interaction of higher-order thinking processes" (Flynn 664) and as "thinking while reading" (Collins 4), and identified with summarizing (Collins 4) -- a sub-process of analysis, questioning (Collins 4) -- a sub-process of evaluation, and generating and weighing options (Beck 676) -- a sub-process of synthesis. *The overlap between thinking and reading behaviors suggests that the thought processes tapped by a thinker are the same ones needed by a reader.*

If the thought processes underlying a critical reader's behavior are elaborated, it will be possible to establish an inventory of a reader's higher-order concerns comparable to the inventory of a writer's higher-order concerns. Consequently, just as a sound method for the teaching of composition has been developed from a writer's higher-order concerns (Cobine "Ways to Evaluate"), so can a sound method for the teaching of literature be developed from a reader's higher-order concerns.

A critical reader "does more than simply soak up bits and pieces of information" (Wilson 4). He applies a personal reserve of knowledge and experience to a text to ascribe possible meanings (Collins 2). In other words, he *interprets*. In addition, he compares his own values and beliefs with those suggested to him by a text, and defends them, if necessary (Wilson 5). In

other words, he *argues* . Moreover, he often organizes his personal response by classifying or comparing possible meanings, and then generalizes about comprehensive meaning (Beck 677-678). In other words, he *infers*. Finally, he analyzes the author's ideas, information, and tactics, and then predicts the author's semantic direction (Wilson 5). In other words, he *speculates*. These behaviors suggest that interpretation, argumentation, inference, and speculation are a reader's higher-order concerns.

THINKER'S BEHAVIOR	DOMINANT THOUGHT PROCESS	READER'S HIGHER-ORDER CONCERN
*draws upon personal reserve of experience and knowledge to ascribe possible meanings	Application	To interpret possible meanings of a text
*substantiates valued meanings with evidence	Evaluation	To argue in support of interpretations of a text
*questions author's ideas, information, and tactics, and guesses about author's semantic direction	Analysis-Synthesis	To speculate about cause-effect and whole-part relations within a text
*organizes various possible meanings and generalizes about comprehensive meaning	Analysis-Synthesis	To infer broader meaning from various possible meanings

A THINKER'S DISCOVERY-READING PROCESS

To direct a student's attention to the concern most relevant to the student at a certain time, the teacher must know the stage in the reading process at which the concern becomes operative. In my reaction paper on the Transactional Theory of Reading, I described the recursive stages of a discovery-reading process (Cobine "Reader Response"). At that point, interpretation was the sole higher-order concern. Now that the "interpretive reader" has been subsumed by the "critical reader," and three additional higher-order concerns have been posited, it is necessary to amend

the discovery-reading process by correlating all four higher-order concerns with the stages that a reader goes through.

In the motivation stage, a reader is motivated by a personal challenge or curiosity to set a personal agenda for reading. While reading, he reflexively associates personal experiences and poignant life-lessons with some aspect of the topic. Evidently, the reader's principal concern is interpretation. *The teacher wants to encourage a reader at this stage to interpret the text in a personally meaningful way, so that the reader's emotional response enhances his intellectual response* (Wilson 9).

In the perception stage, a reader perceives the sensations, emotions, intuitions, and thoughts, as well as the associated experience and knowledge, evoked in him by reading a text. In the communication stage, he communicates the grounds for these perceptions. In the optimal reading situation, where the two stages are linked, the reader's principal concern is argumentation, for the reader is trying to support his interpretations of the text. *The teacher wants to encourage the readers at this stage to use the text as the medium of communication, , so that they argue on common ground* (Wilson 9).

In the exploration stage, the reader explores the various possible meanings of a text. Upon realizing that his initial interpretations are not unanimous, he questions himself, other readers, and the author. In effect, he questions the act of interpretation itself, asking why he sees one meaning, whereas another reader sees another meaning, and which meaning the author might be intending. Evidently, his principal concern is speculation, for he is concerned with cause-effect relations. *The teacher wants to encourage readers at this stage to notice how their attitude towards the author/text influences their interpretations, so that they become keen readers.*

In the deliberation stage, a reader enlarges and modifies his perceptions. Evidently, his principal concern is inference, for he re-interprets various possible meanings, as he re-reads, and generalizes about overall meaning. *The teacher wants to encourage students at this stage to identify the suppositions and presumptions upon which they are building generalizations, so that they can judge for themselves the vaildity of these generalizations*

STAGE IN DISCOVERY-READING PROCESS	READER'S PRINCIPAL CONCERN
Motivation	**Interpretation**
Reader responds to general topic by associating personal experiences and poignant life-lessons with the topic.	To ascribe preliminary meanings to text

Perception and **Communication**
Reader responds to other readers' perceptions by supporting his own perceptions.

Argumentation
To evaluate meanings and support valued meanings

Exploration
Reader responds to various interpretations by exploring causation.

Speculation / Re-interpretation
To speculate about the causes of different interpretations

Deliberation
Reader responds to re-readings by generalizing about the text.

Inference / Re-interpretation
To organize information and ideas, and to infer broader ideas

A WORKSHOP METHOD FOR THE TEACHING OF LITERATURE

A workshop is probably the most effective vehicle for initiating students into a discovery-reading process and bringing out the critical reader within students, for it satisfies three conditions usually unsatisfied by a critical-reading program implemented in a traditional classroom. First, it ensures that a student has sufficient background on the topic. Second, it allows the student an authentic purpose. Third, it helps the student to develop transferable reading strategies.

A student in the motivation stage needs sufficient background on a reading topic to begin interpretation. A critical-reading program is ineffectual when the student is asked to reason out topics about which he lacks background knowledge (Beck 677). In a traditional classroom, a student is sometimes given an assignment taken from materials pre-packaged by publishers who know nothing about the backgrounds of any particular group of students, even when the publishers claim to be promoting critical reading (Wilson 8). In a workshop, in contrast, a study of a piece of literature can be individualized through certain activities. For entry #1 of a **Reading Log**, for example, the student writes what he already knows about the topic (Cobine "Reader Response"). If he is starting Fahrenheit 451, he might write about censorship, or if he is starting Great Expectations, he might write about growing up in a non-traditional household. If the general topic of a piece of literature is not explicit enough in the opening chapter, the teacher gives sufficient background information before the students start reading. For To Kill a Mockingbird, he would give information about the historical origins of Civil Rights Movement in the South, for example.

In the motivation stage, the student also needs a personally meaningful purpose for reading. He develops a reader's concerns insofar as he "reads, writes, and thinks for real purposes" (Wilson 5). In a traditional classroom, however, a purpose is usually contrived by the

teacher to allow for instruction in a sequence of isolated reading skills, skills that are, moreover, useless to the student because he cannot mold information into new personal knowledge in that way (Wilson 6). In a workshop, in contrast, the individualized study of a piece of literature allows the student to set a personal agenda for reading. For entry #3 of the Reading Log (Cobine "Reader Response"), for example, the student describes a special sub-topic of interest. Then, after answering a Discovery Question for entry #4 and after collaborating with a reading partner for entry #5, he writes a short essay about the special sub-topic for entry #6, to be presented to the class for discussion.

At every stage in the discovery-reading process, the student needs to be active -- to develop transferable reading strategies. Even when the student has sufficient background and a meaningful purpose, a critical-reading program is ineffectual unless the student learns to transfer reading strategies to new reading situations (Beck 678). In a workshop, a core study of a piece of literature can be undertaken to encourage the students to develop reading strategies transferable to new reading situations. In a **Conflict-Resolution Study** (Beck 679-680), for example, which is adaptable to any piece of literature through a variety of activities, the teacher, in step one, gives key background information on the conflict and then assigns a reading up to the conflict in the story. In step two, he asks the students to use their background knowledge to predict a possible resolution of the conflict; then, he assigns a reading of the passage that leads up to the resolution. In step three, he asks the students to articulate the resolution of the conflict; then, he asks them to infer from the description and exposition in the story precisely what the characters who resolved the conflict must have known. In step four, he presents a scenario with a hypothetical problem similar to the one in the story and asks them to use what they learned from the study of the story to solve the problem, often granting them one magical literary power such as limited omniscience.

As the critical reading of literature becomes normal practice through both the individualized-study and the core-study activities, thinking becomes habitual for students. Their critical reader's behavior activates underlying thought processes, which the teacher relates to a reader's higher-order concerns. At every stage of their discovery-reading experience, the students have a principal concern: They are interpreting, arguing, speculating, and inferring about literature. These, then, are the roses that the teacher wants to grow in the classroom-garden.

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